

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE OF THE HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Construction and/or future operations and maintenance (O&M) of the proposed Southern California Edison (SCE) Cross Valley Transmission Line (Cross Valley Line) may harass, harm, or kill (i.e., “take”) species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Therefore, SCE is seeking a permit pursuant to Section 10 of the ESA for take of these species during construction and future O&M along the 23-mile-long Cross Valley Line.

A habitat conservation plan (HCP) is a required component of a Section 10 incidental take permit (ITP) application. The overall purpose of a HCP is to develop and implement a conservation plan that would avoid, minimize, and compensate for the incidental take of Federally listed species, and the incidental take of species that could become listed during implementation of the HCP.

Therefore, the Cross Valley Line HCP has been prepared as part of SCE’s ITP application. In addition to the construction and future O&M of the Cross Valley Line, the ITP application includes future O&M activities for the existing transmission line located in the north-south portion of the proposed Cross Valley Line’s transmission corridor.

## SCOPE OF THE HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

### DURATION

SCE has determined that 30 years is sufficient for it to construct and operate the Cross Valley Line and to implement related avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. In addition, predicting effects of the operational Cross Valley Line beyond 30 years may be difficult because species’ distribution and listing status may change over time. SCE may elect to apply for renewal of the HCP and ITP at the end of the 30-year-long permit term.

### PLANNING AREA

The HCP Planning Area consists of the location of the proposed 23-mile Cross Valley Line, the right-of-way (ROW) lands located beneath the new line, unimproved and paved roads that SCE would use to access the ROW, existing laydown yards where materials and equipment would be stored, temporary work areas adjacent to new tubular steel pole (TSP) or lattice steel tower (LST) structures, lands adjacent to the ROW boundary, and lands adjacent to new access roads. In total, the HCP Planning Area encompasses approximately 3,385 acres.

### COVERED SPECIES

Species proposed for coverage are those for which the HCP provides for their conservation and management, and for which take authorization may be required during the term of the HCP. SCE identified these species based on an initial assessment of the potential effects of Covered Activities on listed species and species that could become listed during the term of the HCP. A total of 39 special-status species with the potential to occur in the HCP

Planning Area (23 animals and 16 plants) were evaluated for coverage on the basis of specific criteria. Of these, 13 species met all of these criteria and are included as Covered Species addressed by this HCP:

- ▶ Vernal pool fairy shrimp
- ▶ Vernal pool tadpole shrimp
- ▶ Valley elderberry longhorn beetle
- ▶ California tiger salamander
- ▶ Western spadefoot toad
- ▶ Little willow flycatcher
- ▶ Southwestern willow flycatcher
- ▶ Least Bell's vireo
- ▶ Western burrowing owl
- ▶ San Joaquin kit fox
- ▶ Hoover's spurge
- ▶ San Joaquin Valley Orcutt grass
- ▶ Spiny-sepaled button-celery

These Covered Species are expected to be named in the ITP. In exchange, the HCP includes avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for each species and provisions for the long-term conservation and management of all 13 species, whether or not they are currently listed. Accordingly, any nonlisted species addressed by the HCP's conservation strategy would not require additional conservation within the HCP Planning Area should that species become listed under the Federal ESA during the term of the ITP. SCE would also receive similar assurances for listed species that are included as Covered Species.

## **COVERED ACTIVITIES**

The HCP describes the construction and O&M of the Cross Valley Line in terms of 22 activities (Covered Activities) that could result in take of Covered Species. Covered Activities may be performed by SCE employees or contractors.

Construction of the Cross Valley Line would entail the following Covered Activities:

- ▶ Operation and restoration of existing laydown yards
- ▶ Construction of new access roads
- ▶ Improvement and repair of existing access roads
- ▶ Construction of transmission line structures
- ▶ Stringing of conductors and optical ground wires (OPGWs)
- ▶ Installation of storm water pollution prevention plan best management practices

O&M Covered Activities are organized into two classes (Class 1 and Class 2), defined by the location and type of land disturbance associated with the activity. Class 1 O&M activities would be conducted entirely within the drivable surface of access roads or within TSP and LST structure pads, or would be implemented from aircraft/helicopter; therefore, these activities would not disturb vegetation or the soil surface of natural land cover (but could harass, harm, or kill an individual of a Covered Species). Six Class 1 O&M Covered Activities would occur:

- ▶ Aerial inspections
- ▶ Routine line patrols in the HCP Planning Area
- ▶ OPGW testing
- ▶ Minor repairs to LST and TSP structures
- ▶ Minor repairs to conductors
- ▶ Insulator washing

Class 2 O&M Covered Activities would be conducted in part in natural land cover outside of TSP and LST structure pads and outside the drivable surface of access roads; therefore, these activities may disturb vegetation and land in those areas. Ten Class 2 O&M Covered Activities would occur:

- ▶ Major repairs to TSP and LST structures
- ▶ TSP replacement
- ▶ LST replacement
- ▶ Major repairs to conductors and OPGWs
- ▶ Repair/replacement of bird flight diverters
- ▶ Access road maintenance
- ▶ Maintenance and replacement of road drainage systems and stormwater diversion structures
- ▶ Installation of storm water pollution prevention plan best management practices
- ▶ Vegetation management—tree pruning
- ▶ ROW management—brush and weed abatement

## IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Based on the description of Covered Activities and a description of natural resources in the HCP Planning Area, the HCP evaluates the potential effects of Covered Activities on Covered Species. For each Covered Species, this evaluation includes an estimate of the acreage of suitable habitat that would be temporarily or permanently affected by Covered Activities. The total amount of land subject to disturbance is approximately 90 acres. However, some areas would be disturbed multiple times during the 30-year term of the ITP, and as a result, total disturbance of suitable habitat would be approximately 190 acres.

Covered Species differ in the amount of suitable habitat that would be affected. For each species, different types of natural or agricultural vegetation provide habitat, and thus, different amounts of suitable habitat would be disturbed. Also, in some instances, effects on a species' habitat could extend beyond the boundaries of areas directly disturbed by Covered Activities.

To determine amounts of proposed mitigation, effects on suitable habitat were tabulated based on their duration (temporary versus permanent) and location relative to the Friant-Kern Canal (because landscapes west of the canal generally provide lower quality habitat). Effects on habitat adjacent to disturbed areas, which would generally reduce habitat quality but would not eliminate habitat, also were tabulated separately.

## CONSERVATION STRATEGY

For each Covered Species, the HCP's conservation strategy provides biological goals and objectives, a set of measures that constitutes this HCP's approach to minimizing effects and mitigating unavoidable effects on the species, and a rationale for the approach to minimization and mitigation.

### MINIMIZATION MEASURES

Measures to minimize effects on Covered Species consist of standard planning and design measures and general construction avoidance and minimization measures (AMMs), which are initially presented as part of the Covered Activities, and also additional measures specific to a particular species or habitat (e.g., wetlands). In total, 54 measures to minimize effects are included in the HCP. SCE and its contractors would implement these measures as applicable during Covered Activities.

### MITIGATION STRATEGY

As mitigation for unavoidable effects on Covered Species (including their habitat), SCE proposes to implement one of the following options for each Covered Species:

- ▶ Purchase mitigation credits at a USFWS-approved conservation bank(s).
- ▶ Preserve compensatory habitat in perpetuity at a USFWS-approved permittee-responsible ("turnkey") mitigation site.
- ▶ Restore and protect habitat on-site.
- ▶ Implement a combination of the above approaches.
- ▶ Enact another means acceptable to USFWS.

In total, the Cross Valley Line HCP proposes that approximately 15 acres of vernal pool and just over 200 acres of grassland mitigation land provide suitable habitat for Covered Species at a conservation bank and/or "turnkey" mitigation site. The HCP also proposes purchasing mitigation credits for valley elderberry longhorn beetle, consistent with USFWS mitigation guidelines, at a USFWS-approved conservation bank. SCE would implement a riparian habitat enhancement plan to augment riparian habitat in the HCP Planning Area (Appendix F). There may also be opportunities to offset impacts on other species' habitats through on-site habitat restoration and/or protection. A summary of the estimated area of effect and proposed mitigation acreage is provided in Table ES-1.

## HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The HCP also describes plan implementation. Implementation of the HCP includes monitoring, adaptive management, reporting, and funding. Changes to circumstances affecting the HCP and revision and amendment processes are also described.

Table ES-1 Summary of Proposed Compensatory Mitigation for the Cross Valley Line			
Habitat (Species)	Impacts (Acres) <sup>1</sup>	Proposed Mitigation (Acres)	Proposed Location
<b><i>Vernal Pool/Swale Habitat (VPFS/VPTS/CTS [reproduction]/WSFT [reproduction]/HOSP/SJVOG/SSBC)</i></b>			
Permanent Direct Impacts	0.15	14.86	USFWS-approved conservation bank or USFWS-approved permittee-responsible mitigation site
Permanent Indirect Impacts	4.71		
Temporary Impacts	0.25		
<b><i>Annual Grassland Habitat (CTS [aestivation/foraging]/WSFT [aestivation/foraging]/BUOW [reproduction]/SJKF [reproduction]/HOSP/SJVOG)</i></b>			
Permanent Direct Impacts	40.96	169.58	USFWS-approved conservation bank or USFWS-approved permittee-responsible mitigation site
Permanent Indirect Impacts	0		
Temporary Impacts	52.40		
<b><i>Agricultural Habitat (CTS [movement]/BUOW [foraging]/SJKF [foraging/movement])</i></b>			
Permanent Direct Impacts	11.65	33.82	USFWS-approved conservation bank or USFWS-approved permittee-responsible mitigation site
Permanent Indirect Impacts	0		
Temporary Impacts	70.00		
<b><i>Riparian Habitat (LWF/SWF/LBV)<sup>2</sup></i></b>			
Permanent Direct Impacts	0	Riparian habitat enhancement	Along the St. John’s River in HCP Planning Area
Permanent Indirect Impacts	0		
Temporary Impacts	0		
<b><i>Elderberry Shrubs (VELB)</i></b>			
Permanent Direct Impacts	To be determined, based on preconstruction surveys	Mitigate according to USFWS VELB Guidelines	USFWS-approved conservation bank
Permanent Indirect Impacts			
Temporary Impacts			
Notes: BUOW = burrowing owl; CTS = California tiger salamander; HOSP = Hoover’s spurge; LBV = least Bell’s vireo; LWF = little willow flycatcher; SJKF = San Joaquin kit fox; SJVOG = San Joaquin Valley Orcutt grass; SSBC = spiny-sepaed button celery; SWF = Southwestern willow flycatcher; USFWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; VELB = valley elderberry longhorn beetle; VPFS = vernal pool fairy shrimp; VPTS = vernal pool tadpole shrimp; WSFT= Western spadefoot toad			
<sup>1</sup> Acres depict the greatest impact incurred for the land cover type.			
<sup>2</sup> Although Covered Activities would not result in the removal of any riparian habitat, temporary Covered Activities have the potential to cause harassment of nesting birds.			
Source: Data compiled by AECOM in 2013			

## MONITORING

Per regulation, an HCP must include monitoring of conservation measures and the response of Covered Species to these measures. The monitoring plan outlined in the Cross Valley Line HCP is designed to meet the following five objectives:

- ▶ Evaluate progress toward the biological goals described in the HCP's conservation strategy for each species.
- ▶ Document actual effects associated with construction and O&M Covered Activities.
- ▶ Document implementation, compliance with, and effectiveness of construction and O&M AMMs.
- ▶ Document compliance with and effectiveness of compensatory and other mitigation requirements.
- ▶ Identify changed circumstances, if any.

## ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

The adaptive management program of the Cross Valley Line HCP is designed to address the following key uncertainties:

- ▶ **Accuracy of HCP Estimates of Covered Species Take**—The HCP's impact assessment estimates the amount of take for each Covered Species. Should monitoring find these estimates to be inaccurate, SCE would adjust mitigation requirements as necessary.
- ▶ **Location of Environmentally Sensitive Areas**—Environmentally Sensitive Areas include suitable habitat of Covered Species as well as species-specific buffers/avoidance areas around these habitats, and their mapped locations are necessary for implementing a number of the HCP's minimization measures. Thus, SCE would update maps of these areas periodically based on the results of monitoring and implementation of minimization measures.
- ▶ **Effectiveness of Minimization Measures**—Based on a review of monitoring results, "lessons learned" and alternative strategies would be identified and measures revised in coordination with USFWS to increase the minimization measures' effectiveness, as necessary.

## ANNUAL REPORTS

An annual report documenting implementation of Covered Activities, effects, conservation actions, management actions, habitat revegetation actions, results of monitoring efforts (i.e., compliance monitoring, effects monitoring, and effectiveness monitoring), and any proposed adaptive management actions would be prepared and submitted to USFWS throughout the term of the ITP.

## PLAN FUNDING

SCE would be responsible for funding full implementation of this HCP. Costs associated with implementation of the HCP are as follows:

- ▶ Administration and training
- ▶ Securing compensatory mitigation sites in perpetuity
- ▶ Implementation of AMMs

- ▶ Implementation of monitoring and adaptive management on mitigation sites
- ▶ Implementation of remedial actions for changed circumstances

SCE would fund implementation of the HCP using the operating budgets of relevant departments.

## **CHANGED AND UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES**

The HCP describes SCE’s obligations for addressing changes in circumstances affecting a species or geographic area covered by the HCP that can reasonably be anticipated and planned for (“changed circumstances”). These changed circumstances include new species listings and new critical habitat designations in the HCP Planning Area, unexpected discovery of additional listed species in the HCP Planning Area, climate change, invasion by nonnative species, vandalism, and several natural disasters (e.g., fire, drought, floods).

Changes in circumstances not described as changed circumstances, which would result in a substantial and adverse change in the status of a Covered Species, are considered “unforeseen circumstances.” The No Surprises Rule provides SCE with assurances regarding unforeseen circumstances: no additional land restrictions or financial compensation will be required for species adequately covered by a properly implemented HCP, in light of unforeseen circumstances, without the consent of permittees.

## **PLAN REVISION AND AMENDMENT**

The HCP and the ITP may be modified in accordance with existing regulations. Modifications to the HCP may be requested by SCE or USFWS. Two categories of changes are described: minor modifications and more substantial revisions that would require an amendment to the HCP. Amendments may include but are not limited to any of the following types of changes to the HCP:

- ▶ Changes to the HCP Planning Area boundary
- ▶ Increases in the level of incidental take permitted by the HCP
- ▶ Changes to funding except as otherwise provided for in the HCP to account for all adjustments for inflation, adaptive management, and changed circumstances
- ▶ Addition of species to the Covered Species list
- ▶ Changes to the Covered Activities that were not addressed in the HCP as originally adopted, and that do not otherwise meet the minor modification provisions
- ▶ Extension of the term of the ITP past the 30-year permit duration